

623
562 a good deal of influence in connection with quarrels either of individuals or of local groups.

756 There are certain men, and possibly sometimes women, who have an influence over their fellows owing to their being credited with the possession of supernatural powers. These men, called in *Aka-feru oko-jumu* (literally "one who speaks from dreams"), will be described in a later chapter. As they are believed to have command over the powers that produce and cure sickness everyone tries to be on good terms with them, avoiding giving them offence in any way, and seeking their favour by presents of food or other things. It sometimes happens that a chief (the leading man of a local group) is at the same time a medicine-man or *oko-jumu*, but the two positions are entirely distinct and separate, and a man may be a medicine-man who possesses none of the qualities that are necessary for a head man.

673 There does not appear to have been in the Andamans any such thing as the punishment of crime. We may distinguish two kinds of anti-social actions which are regarded by the natives as being wrong. The first kind are those actions which injure in some way a private individual. The second are those, which, while they do not injure any particular person, are yet regarded with disapproval by the society in general.

Amongst the anti-social actions of the first kind are murder, or wounding, theft and adultery, and wilful damage of the property of another.

578
627
682
152 No case of one Andamanese killing another has occurred in recent years. Quarrels sometimes occur between two men of the same camp. A good deal of hard swearing goes on, and sometimes one of the men will work himself up to a high pitch of anger, in which he may seize his bow and discharge an arrow near to the one who has offended him, or may vent his ill-temper by destroying any property that he can lay his hands on, including not only that of his enemy but also that of other persons and even his own. At such a display of anger the women and children flee into the jungle in terror, and if the angry man be at all a formidable person the men occasionally do the same. It apparently requires more courage than the natives usually possess to endeavour to allay such a storm of

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION

49

anger. Yet I found that the slightest show of authority would immediately bring such a scene to an end. A man of influence in his village was probably generally equal to the task of keeping order and preventing any serious damage from taking place. It was probably rare for a man so far to give way to his anger as to kill his opponent.

Such murders did, however, occasionally take place¹. The murderer would, as a rule, leave the camp and hide himself in the jungle, where he might be joined by such of his friends as were ready to take his part. It was left to the relatives and friends of the dead man to exact vengeance if they wished and if they could. If the murderer was a man who was much feared it is probable that he would escape. In any case the anger of the Andamanese is short-lived, and if for a few months he could keep out of the way of those who might seek revenge, it is probable that at the end of that time he would find their anger cooled.

A man who is liable to outbursts of violent anger is feared by his fellows, and unless he has other counterbalancing qualities, he is never likely to become popular. He is treated with outward respect, for every one is afraid of offending him, but he never acquires the esteem of others. There is a special nickname, *Tarenjek*, in the North Andaman, to denote such a man².

Quarrels were more likely to occur at the meetings of different local groups that took place in the fine weather, and such quarrels might occasionally end in the murder of some one. In such a case the quarrel would be taken up by the group

¹ The natives of the North Andaman were able to tell me of a few cases of murder which had occurred within the memory of those still living.

Mr Portman in his *History of Our Relations with the Andamanese* records a certain number of murders which occurred while he was in charge of the Andamanese. One man, who had been imprisoned at Port Blair for murder, committed another soon after his release and was hanged. Since that date there has been no case of murder among the Great Andaman tribes. This is perhaps in part due to the punishment with which they are now threatened by the Government, but another cause is probably the breakdown of the old social organisation which has in this respect rather improved their morals than the opposite.

² The nickname is applied, however, not only to those who deserve it by their character, but also to others; for instance, one man was called *Tarenjek* because his maternal uncle was a man of violent temper.

766 of by cutting it into pieces and burning it on a fire. The natives say that if this be done the 'blood' and the 'fat' of the dead man go up to the sky and this removes all danger to the living from the dead man. The blood of persons so burnt is seen in the sky at sunset. If a man were killed in a fight between two communities and his body remained with the enemy, they would dispose of it in this way. If the friends secured the body they would bury it in the usual way. It may be worthy of remark that this custom of burning the bodies of slain enemies is perhaps the real origin of the belief that the Andamanese are or were cannibals. We can well imagine that when, as must have often happened, sailors venturing to land on the islands have been killed and the survivors have seen the bodies of their companions cut up and placed on fires, they would readily conclude that they were witnessing a cannibal feast. There can be no doubt whatever that since the islands were occupied in 1858 the inhabitants have not practised cannibalism, and there is no good reason to suppose that they once followed the custom and then abandoned it.

764 The burial is conducted, if possible, on the day of the death. If it has to be deferred till the morrow all the inhabitants of the camp keep awake. The relatives sit round the corpse weeping at intervals, while some of the men take it in turn to sing songs during the hours of darkness. This, so they say, is to keep away the spirits that have caused the death, and so prevent them from further mischief. When a man or woman dies in the prime of life after a short illness the friends and relatives often break out in anger which they express in different ways. A man will shout threats and curses at the spirits that he conceives to be responsible for the death of his friend. He may pick up his bow and discharge his arrows in all directions, or in some other way give expression to his angry feelings. On the occasion of a death in one of the *Akar-Bale* villages the relatives expressed their grief by cutting down a coconut tree that grew there.

765 The period of mourning for near relatives—parent, adult child, consort, brother or sister—lasts for several months. In the case of a young child only the parents mourn. The essentials

at Port Blair for the murder of one of his countrymen. He had previously, in 1878, been sentenced to imprisonment for the murder of two children of his tribe, and he committed his last crime soon after his discharge. This has hitherto been the only occasion on which any of these savages has suffered the extreme penalty of British law. It may be added, that this last step was not taken until the unhappy wretch, as well as all his fellow-countrymen in South Andaman, had been repeatedly warned that no other than a capital sentence would in future be passed on those convicted of murder.

4. It is by no means an uncommon occurrence for a man, or even a boy, to vent his ill-temper, or show his resentment at any act, by destroying his own property as well as that of his neighbours, sparing only the things belonging exclusively to the chief, or other head man. The amount of damage done at such times, to canoes and other articles of more or less value, will often give occasion for several weeks' employment in repairing and replacing to himself and his companions; but as these outbreaks are looked upon as the result of a temporary "possession," and the victim considered, for the time being, dangerous, and unaccountable for his actions, no one ventures to offer any opposition, or impose any restraint upon him.

5. Women, when in a rage, occasionally act in a similar manner towards one of their own sex, or even to all the females of the encampment, injuring or destroying their nets, baskets, and other articles; at other times they will seize a burning log, and, banging it furiously on the ground, vent their feelings by some such exclamation as *ngig mū'gu jā'bagike!* (May your face become hideous!); or they will struggle and fight till they are forcibly separated by the wife or daughter of their head man. They do not, however, attempt to settle their differences with the stronger sex, but leave it to their husbands or male relatives to obtain redress for their real or fancied grievances.

6. When a chief or elder so far forgets himself as to lose his temper, those of his own standing betake themselves to their huts, while the other members of the community, male and female, beat a hasty retreat to some secluded spot, for no one would venture to find fault with one in authority, and with some reason, for little or no harm usually results to the community, while his own reputation is sure to suffer. Should he, however, wantonly cause loss or injury to any of his people, they would be pretty certain to take an early, though secret, opportunity of repaying him in kind.

Crime.—1. That outcome of civilisation, suicide, is unknown among them; but, since they have seen cases of self-murder among the alien population, they have coined a lengthy com

761 is lying, and shoots several arrows in rapid succession into the
 766 surrounding jungle, only taking care to avoid injury to the by-standers, and then, seizing a pig-spear, *ēr-dū-tnga*;¹ if *ērem-chāw-gala* be the demon suspected, or a turtle-spear, *kowai'a l'ōko dū-tnga*;² if it be *jū-ru-win*- who is accounted guilty, he pierces the ground all round the corpse, hoping thereby to inflict a mortal injury upon the unseen enemy; while so engaged he vents his grief and indignation in no measured terms of imprecation.

25. When a death which is attributed to *ērem-chāw-gala*'s malignity occurs so late in the day that the burial has to be deferred till the following morning, those who are not mourners sing in turns throughout the night, in the belief that this demon will thus be deterred from doing any further harm in the encampment.

26. At death they say that *ērem-chāw-gala* and his sons feast upon the blood and soft tissues of all who die on land, and that their leavings, excepting of course the bones, are disposed of by worms, *wēn*-, but *jū-ru-win*- is supposed to consume every portion of those who fall into his clutches.

576 Meeting and Parting. &c.—1. Contrary to the customs of most
 races, no salutations³ pass between friends, even after a more or less lengthened separation, such as rubbing noses, kissing⁴ shaking hands, &c.; but on meeting they remain silently gazing at each other for, in our eyes, an absurdly long time—unless of course one or both be hurried; the younger then makes some commonplace remark which apparently has the effect of loosening their tongues, for they at once commence hearing and telling the news.⁵

576 2. Relatives, after an absence of a few weeks or months,
 •152 testify their joy at meeting by sitting with their arms round each other's necks,⁶ and weeping and howling⁷ in a manner which would lead a stranger to suppose that some great sorrow had befallen them; and, in point of fact, there is no difference observable between their demonstrations of joy on these occasions and those of grief at the death of one of their

¹ Vide Appendix B, item 9.

² Vide Appendix B, item 10.

³ Vide Colebrooke and Anderson.

⁴ Kisses are considered indicative of affection, but are only bestowed on infants.

⁵ One might imagine that the writer of the article entitled "Chippers of Flint" which appeared in "Cornhill" (vol. xii, p. 200), had heard of or witnessed a rencontre of this description, but had not watched its progress, or he would not have spoken of this race as "all but speechless."

⁶ Vide Plate III, fig. 2.

⁷ This custom resembles that which exists among New Zealanders under the name of the *Tangi*.

576 number. The crying chorus is started by women, but the men
 52 speedily chime in, and groups of three or four may thus be seen
 weeping in concert until, from sheer exhaustion, they are com-
 pelled to desist; then, if neither of the parties are in mourning,
 a dance is got up, in which the females not unfrequently take
 part, but the style of their performance differs from that of the
 males.¹

3. A husband who is *childless*, and has been absent from his
 home for some time, on his return to the encampment visits first
 a blood relation (if any), and when *they* have wept together he
 goes to his own hut, not in order to shed more tears, but to see
 and talk to his spouse. The same remark applies to a wife
 similarly circumstanced. But in the case of married couples
 who are *parents*, the meeting takes place first between them;
 the wife hangs round her husband's neck sobbing as if her heart
 would break with joy at their re-union; when she is exhausted
 with weeping, he leaves her, and, going to one of his relations,
 gives vent to his pent-up feelings of happiness by bursting into
 tears.

576 4. It is usual for friends at meeting to give each other some-
 thing which may happen to be in their hands at the time, and
 these gifts are regarded as tokens of affection.

[574] 5. Strangers introduced by mutual friends are always warmly
 welcomed by the whole community: they, in common with all
 guests, are the first attended on, the best food in the encamp-
 ment is set before them, and in every way they are well treated;
 presents also are often given them, especially when about to take
 their leave.

6. "Speed the parting guest" is an axiom upon which these
 people invariably act: the departing visitor is accompanied by
 his host to the landing-place, or, at all events, some distance on
 his way; when bidding each other farewell the guest takes the
 hand of his host and blows upon it; when the compliment has
 been returned, the following dialogue ensues:—

Departing visitor: *kam wai dōl*. I am off (*lit.*, Here in-
 deed I).

Host: *ō, ūchik wai dñ; tain tá'lik kach dñ yá'te?* Very well,
 go; when will you come again?

Departing visitor: *nyá'tek dō'nyat mīn ū'kke*. I will bring
 away something for you one of these days.

Host: *jō'bo la ngōng chá'pikok!* May no snake bite you!

Departing visitor: *wai dō ēr-gēlepke*. I will take good care
 of that (*lit.*, I will be watchful).

Afterwards they again blow upon each other's hands, and part.

¹ *Tide post* "Games and Amusements," paragraphs 27 and 30.

tracted hardship and considerable risk, not so much from the natives themselves as from the implacable Andaman sea. We had a terrible time during several of our landings from the open Indian Ocean. Constant danger additionally stimulated the development of research in Little Andaman. All the Indians and the Burmese behaved bravely. Among them I wish to mention here my Indian stenographer, a married man nearing thirty, from Bengal: RANHAIR KUMAR DEV, who, on 12 and 13 February, 1953, on the south coast of the island shared two frightfully narrow escapes with me. I am sure that neither of us will ever forget it. I later found a comfortable landing place, now indicated by floating buoys, on the north coast. Two other Bengalese assistants who were a great help to me in Little Andaman and had been selected from a number of young aspirants, are PRONAB GANGULI and HIMAL CHANDRA ROY. My work in the Andamans could not have been accomplished without them and without the initiative and encouragement of officers such as Dr. B. S. GUHA, Director of the Department of Anthropology of the Indian Government, Mr. AJAY K. GHOSH, the kind, open-minded Chief Commissioner of Andamans and Nicobars during my 1951-1953 stay there, and Mr. S. N. MAITRA, who succeeded Mr. GHOSH as Chief Commissioner. In a book that I am writing I try to point out the significance of my work in the Andamans, carried out with the help of such distinguished, and sometimes heroic, Indian collaborators.

I. Hygienic Conditions

1. Habitation

The nomadic Onge have two kinds of shelter: one temporary, the other permanent, used only for short periods at a time. The Little Andaman forest is full of abandoned temporary shelters; the permanent camps are fewer, mainly situated along the coast. They consist of communal huts, strongly built by a number of families roaming under the direction of a leader. The huts have a ritual significance, as we shall presently see. Inside each communal hut are a number of beds generally equal to the number of families. Small fires are kept burning day and night near the beds, a precaution that I was thankful for on many cold nights succeeded by hot days. The Onge require nothing more against the cold. In their camps they can withstand the heaviest storms and drenching rains. In order to avoid chills it is enough for them to protect their fires from extinction. This applied to me too, while living among the Onge. The warmth and the dry air ensured good health for us all.

A few additional beds are for the use of bachelors nearing marriage. Most of the beds are marginally and radially placed; a few are placed transversally. Normal beds accommodate father, mother (the Onge are monogamous), children and dogs, all in a heap. In temporary as in permanent shelters it is customary for families to eat separately, each close to its bed. The low, round roof of the communal hut does not reach the ground; a gap of 30 cms is left free for creeping in and out at will without using the main door (a simple mat to be lifted). Rubbish is thrown carelessly everywhere, e.g. directly outside the circular hut, which is consequently surrounded by a malodorous ring of bones, imperfectly cleaned shells, bits of rotting shellfish and other animals - a rich breeding ground for flies and various other insects that rapidly destroy everything edible, leaving the grass to grow until the next lot of garbage accumulates. Building and rebuilding a communal hut always on the same

THE PEOPLE OF THE ISLANDS

The Onges do not seem to require any preventive measures, and seem naturally immune to malaria. They do, however, transmit the disease to strangers, through the mosquitoes which are everywhere in Little Andaman. Like many other inhabitants of tropical areas, they probably all carry the disease without being affected by it - neither children nor adults show any sign of splenic enlargement. 164 [36]

In contrast to their periodic gorging, the Onges will equally cheerfully endure hunger, thirst and exhaustion. During our hazardous canoe trip to South Brother, however, they appeared much more affected than I was by long exposure to the sun. We were completely without any means of shelter for an entire afternoon in the open sea, and though the Onges tried to cover their heads as best they could, they still developed severe (and genuine) headaches, and were clearly much happier in the dark forest, which must be considered their natural environment. 147 [261]

Nothing has hitherto been known of the intelligence level and general psychology of the Onges. The childishness of their behaviour, however, is curiously in keeping with their strikingly child-like appearance. Like children, they seek only the satisfaction of elementary stimuli, and like children they pass in a flash from one mood to another, so that they are a people of sudden contrasts. 15

One example is their passionate love for their dogs, in marked contrast to the intense cruelty with which they hunt their prey. Having once realized the usefulness of dogs, first imported into the islands some thirty years ago, the Onges now pet them like little girls with their dolls, and the Onge women will suckle the family puppies quite naturally with their own children. Yet once a dog dies the other side of the Onge nature comes to the fore and the carcase is thrown into the forest - there is no looking back. 231 152 [177]

Their minds are in a sense inventive, in that they have evolved devices to help them acquire their food, but they have never, for example, thought of the fish-hook, despite the abundance of iron pieces thrown up by shipwrecks all round the islands. Anything new is taken up with a child's momentary enthusiasm, but they have no notion of sustained mental effort such as any form of counting. 157 [802]

Like children, too, the Onges laugh at the slightest thing, although their mirth is always restrained. In this they differ from the African peoples, particularly the Bushmen, who are often by 157 522